



# OPERATING IN THE DARK:

What Outdated State Policies  
and Data Gaps Mean for  
Effective School Leadership

A Special Report by



GEORGE W. BUSH  
INSTITUTE

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Kerri Briggs, Gretchen Rhines Cheney,  
Jacquelyn Davis and Kerry Moll

## WHO WE ARE: THE GEORGE W. BUSH INSTITUTE

The George W. Bush Institute is an action-oriented organization, focused on results-based solutions for improving the human condition through education reform, human freedom, global health, and economic growth. Across all areas of engagement, the Bush Institute works to empower women through its Women's Initiative. And the Military Service Initiative helps military support organizations achieve their goals and honor the sacrifice members of the military and their families make.

The Bush Institute's Education Reform effort works to improve public education by focusing on accountability, middle school transformation, and school leadership. Advancing Accountability, the foundation of our work, reviews state accountability systems to understand how these systems promote student learning and school improvement, and the Global Report Card provides parents with information that allows them to compare their school district with schools across the world. Middle School Matters, relying on research-based practices in data, early warning systems, instruction, and student supports, focuses on the middle grades so that students get to high school ready to graduate.

The Alliance to Reform Education Leadership is working to redefine the role of and empower America's school leaders. AREL convenes results-oriented principal preparation programs to learn from each other and share effective practices, spotlights necessary district and state conditions, and inspires key stakeholders to focus on school leadership as a critical lever to improving students' educations. AREL believes that for our students to be prepared to compete in an increasingly global economy, principals must become leaders who create cultures of achievement throughout their buildings and develop highly effective teaching forces. All of AREL's efforts are guided by the common goal of improving student achievement across the nation.

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The George W. Bush Institute is grateful to the many individuals who contributed to and supported the creation and launch of the *Principal Policy State Survey*. President and Mrs. Bush chose to make education reform and school leadership a key focus of the Institute, building on their life's work to improve educational outcomes for all students, and they continue to challenge the team to move the agenda forward with even more urgency, knowing what is at stake for our students. Ambassadors Mark Langdale and James K. Glassman have thoughtfully shepherded this historic institution into being and provided excellent guidance across all the initiative areas. We are grateful for the on-going support and strategic counsel of the Advisory Council for Education, chaired by the Honorable Margaret Spellings, U.S. Secretary of Education 2005-2009. Thank you to Kerri Briggs, the dedicated and tireless leader of the Institute's entire education reform portfolio, who is always able to jump into a project and add tremendous value. As the relatively new Director of AREL, Kerry Moll has brought tremendous energy and grounded leadership to the Alliance to Reform Education Leadership initiative. Jacquelyn Davis and Gretchen Rhines Cheney conceived of this project and led the survey, data collection, and report writing efforts. Monique Gray and Patrick Kobler provided invaluable research and analysis support throughout.

We would like to thank the following people who were extremely helpful in our upfront planning and who took the time to review and give us feedback on the survey: Ben Fenton and Jackie Gran of New Leaders, Tabitha Grossman of the National Governors Association, Sara Shelton of the National Conference of State Legislatures, and Tyler Whitmore of Stand for Children.

Experts in three states completed a pilot survey and gave us feedback and suggestions before we launched the final survey: Carolyn Dumaesq and Dave Volkman from Pennsylvania, Marg Mast from Indiana, and Peter Shulman from New Jersey.

A big thank you to Gene Wilhoit, Chris Minnich, and Janice Poda at the Council of Chief State School Officers for helping us distribute the survey and encouraging states to respond.

The Alliance to Reform Education Leadership and this publication would not be possible without the generous support of our funding partners: AT&T, Bass Foundation, CME Group Foundation, Sid W. Richardson Foundation, and The Prudential Foundation.

We are grateful for the reactions and insights shared by the peer reviewers of this report: Ben Fenton at New Leaders, Frederick M. Hess at the American Enterprise Institute, Paige Kowalski at the Data Quality Campaign, and Janice Poda at the Council of Chief State School Officers. GWBI assumes responsibility for any errors or omissions in this report.

Finally and most importantly, despite pressing workloads, all 50 states and the District of Columbia took time to respond to our survey and often further engaged in follow-up and conversations about their policies. We are enormously appreciative of state leaders' investment in and dedication to this effort and for their interest in learning from each other.

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Dear Colleagues,

It is with great excitement that I share the results of our first-ever *Principal Policy State Survey*.

The George W. Bush Institute (GWBI) launched The Alliance to Reform Education Leadership (AREL) to redefine the role of and empower America's school leaders because effective school leaders are critical to improved student achievement outcomes. States are key to this work as they have the power to create a system of cohesive education leadership policies that can work to enhance the quality of school leaders in a state. Principals, in turn, are responsible for attracting, developing, and retaining teacher talent and driving the improvement of student learning.

This survey was done with the intention of creating one central repository of information on state policies impacting principal preparation and licensure. We are grateful to all 50 states and the District of Columbia for taking the time not only to respond to our survey but also to engage in follow-up and important conversations about the way forward. GWBI tried very hard to make the data-gathering process as transparent and as collaborative as possible in order to capture the nuances and gray areas at play in state policies and approaches.

We were encouraged by states' interest in and commitment to building systems that support effective principals. Many states are already embarking on efforts to reform their principal effectiveness policies and practices. Some of this has been spurred by the focus on creating great teachers and leaders in the federal Race to the Top grant competition. In other cases, states are seeing the connections between their efforts to strengthen school leader and teacher evaluation practices and how prepared principals are when they are hired.

We were pleased by the overall interest in our survey and the fact that many states saw this information gathering as an opportunity to engage in discussions about how to better align systems and policies. A few states even asked us if they could share our survey questions with their state leadership teams to help inform their analysis and drive reform.

In addition to this cross-state analysis, we produced snapshots for each of the 50 states and the District of Columbia. These snapshots plus our comprehensive database can be accessed through our website: [www.bushcenter.org/educationpolicy](http://www.bushcenter.org/educationpolicy). The snapshots are not intended to judge or compare states but rather to help states learn from each other, especially as they undertake redesign and reform efforts. We hope this report and the accompanying state snapshots and data will further the national discussion and advance states' efforts to improve the quality of school leaders.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Kerry Ann Moll".

Kerry Ann Moll, Ed.D.

Director

Alliance to Reform Education Leadership





# INTRODUCTION

**The *Principal Policy State Survey* is a first-of-its-kind effort** to capture the current state of affairs in state principal preparation, licensure policy, principal tenure, and data collection on the output of these policies. We began this work somewhat accidentally. We were searching for a summary of state policies and regulations on principal preparation and licensure. Despite our calls to leading national organizations and experts across the country, we were unable to locate a comprehensive data set. Seeing a need, we chose to launch a six-month study, contacting all 50 states and the District of Columbia to explore how states were using their authority to increase the supply of high-quality principals who could raise student achievement in schools.

This report, supplemented by the individual state snapshots and the state database, details our findings. It is our hope that these will be used to drive needed reforms and give state policymakers new insights on what their peers are doing to improve the supply of high-quality leaders.

## THE NEED FOR HIGH-QUALITY PRINCIPALS

The research is clear: principals are critical to school improvement and student achievement.<sup>1</sup> We believe the oft-quoted finding that principals account for a quarter of a school's total impact on student learning actually understates the principal's power because the principal influences teacher quality. The principal oversees the hiring, development, and management of teachers who account for the largest share of a school's impact on student learning. Because principals manage the teaching force, they are best positioned to ensure that every student has a great teacher year after year. Without a high-quality principal at the helm, students are unlikely to have the necessary successive years of effective teaching for their continued learning. We also know that strong teachers will leave a school if they do not feel that the principal provides a supportive environment.<sup>2</sup> Thus, an effective principal is vital for student achievement.

But there are not enough highly skilled principals available today. The principal supply crisis is particularly evident in urban districts, which report low applicant-to-hire ratios and a general lack of high-quality candidates.<sup>3</sup> Rural communities also have trouble recruiting and retaining quality principals.<sup>4</sup> Leadership talent is key to helping schools in urban and rural areas turn around their chronically low-performing schools. Moreover, according to some estimates, 40 percent of the current principal workforce will retire by 2014, and workforce turnover rates only increase as the professional workforce ages.<sup>5</sup> Charter school operators also report that the shortage of high-quality leaders is a top barrier to growth of the sector. A 2010 study done

by the Center on Reinventing Public Education found that 71 percent of charter leaders plan to leave their positions in the next five years.<sup>6</sup> So both within district and charter schools, there is a significant need for more high-quality leaders across the country.

State action to address the principal supply challenge should be driven by data and strategy. States need to understand the current state of affairs, including projected principal vacancies and the quantity and quality of principals who complete preparation programs and secure their licenses. This information forms the basis of a coherent set of policies to expand the principal talent pool to ensure our schools are being guided by effective leaders:

- How many principals do the school districts and charters in the state need on average each year to fill vacancies? What is the turnover rate?
- What is the annual output of graduates from preparation programs?
- How many graduates actually secure licenses to enable them to serve as principals?
- How many of those licensed principals obtain principal and assistant principal positions?
- Do these leaders successfully retain those jobs?
- Are these leaders effective in their jobs based on principal evaluations?
- Are they effective in raising student achievement year after year?
- What is the quality of the graduates from the individual principal preparation programs? Which programs produce effective graduates and which programs need improvement?
- Are enough quality school leaders being produced for the state's need?

## THE STATE ROLE IN SUPPLYING HIGH-QUALITY PRINCIPALS

While districts have hiring authority, states control the entry point to the principalship and have several powerful policy and regulatory levers at their disposal, which we explore in this report.

### Principal Preparation Program Approval

First, states approve principal preparation programs to train future leaders and thus guide their quality. States have the power to set the requirements, including specific coursework, school-based learning experiences, and faculty qualifications. States also oversee programs, defining the process for determining if programs meet the required criteria for approval and re-approval.

### Principal Licensure

Second, every state requires that its K–12 public school leaders be licensed. States set the standards for both securing initial licensure—certifying principals as qualified to be hired for the job—as well as renewing those licenses after principals are on the job after a determined period of time.

## Principal Outcome Data

Finally, states have the ability—some would say responsibility—to collect and monitor data to know if the principals who are being recruited, selected, and prepared are then effective once on the job and how the programs that prepare them compare.

## WHAT WE LEARNED

Our analysis of responses from all 50 states and the District of Columbia to the *Principal Policy State Survey* questions uncovered two unfortunate patterns: 1) in many cases, states are not effectively using their authority to improve the supply of high-quality school leaders; and 2) in general, states lack key data on the supply and quality of school leaders.

### States Ineffectively Using Their Authority

We found that many states are not using their principal preparation oversight, licensure, and data-monitoring powers to improve the supply of high-quality principals for their schools. Their approaches often lack rigor or rely on out-of-date criteria. The job of the principal is complex and highly demanding. Exemplary principals hire, develop, support, and retain successful teachers, create a culture of high expectations, take a data-based approach to instructional leadership, and work tirelessly in support of student learning.<sup>7</sup> Yet states are making important decisions on how principals are recruited and selected into preparation programs, trained, and licensed to lead without a coherent strategy or the appropriate amount of rigor.

### Missing Data

Many states lack critical data to enable them to use their authority effectively to influence the supply and quality of school leaders. Even when we reached out to multiple people—often across multiple agencies—in many cases, states were unable to locate requested data or it was simply not tracked at the state level.

**Supply Data:** Some states lack basic information on their principal supply and thus have no way of knowing if they are producing the right numbers of new principals to step into school leadership positions:

- 19 states were unable to report how many people graduate from state-approved principal preparation programs in their states on an annual basis
- 7 states could not report how many principal licenses are granted on an annual basis

**Performance Data:** Most concerning, states have almost no information about how their newly prepared and licensed principals perform once they are on the job.

- 28 states report that neither the state nor principal preparation programs are required to collect *any* outcome data on principal preparation program graduates to know if they secure jobs, retain them, show impact on student achievement, or earn effective ratings on principal evaluations.

Without these data, states are unable to distinguish their most successful principal preparation programs from their weakest. The result is that most states are unable to hold preparation programs accountable for producing successful principals.

- 33 states do not have data on principal job placement rates by principal preparation program.
- 39 states do not have data on principal job retention rates by principal preparation program.
- 36 states do not have data on principal job effectiveness (as measured by evaluation) by principal preparation program.
- 37 states do not have data on principal job effectiveness (as measured by student achievement impact) by principal preparation program.

Additionally, most states are not using outcome data when re-approving principal preparation programs to ensure rigor, expand the strongest programs, and either improve or eventually shut down those programs that are not offering high-quality preparation.

- Only 17 states report considering *even one* type of program graduate outcome data when re-approving principal preparation programs. Outcome data includes evidence of graduates securing a job, retaining a job, being effective in raising student achievement, or earning an effective rating on their evaluation.

In many cases, states are also making principal preparation program approval decisions based on program type (i.e., operated by institutions of higher education) rather than the characteristics and quality of the program. By preventing non-profit, district, charter management organization, or other program providers to apply for approval, states are limiting their options to expand the supply of high-quality school leaders.

- 19 states report that they only allow institutions of higher education to gain approval to operate as a principal preparation program.

The prevalence of missing data hampers the ability of states to plan strategically and be proactive in influencing the quality and quantity of their principal supply to serve their districts and schools. Failure to collect and monitor the outcomes of principal preparation and licensure investments leaves states making haphazard decisions and operating in the dark.

## SURVEY METHODOLOGY

GWBI developed the *Principal Policy State Survey* and distributed it by email to the Chief State School Officers beginning in March 2012 with follow-up calls and emails to locate the best person(s) within each state department of education or related agency to complete the survey. Initial responses were gathered using Survey Monkey. GWBI used the data collected to create snapshots of the states and the District of Columbia. The draft snapshots were shared with survey respondents to verify accuracy, collect any missing information, and correct any errors. Data presented should be considered accurate as of August 2012.

The questions focus on principal effectiveness standards; state requirements for principal preparation programs to be approved and the process for doing so; state requirements for principal licensure and renewal; and principal tenure. Principal evaluation was not included because other organizations were already collecting data on state efforts to design evaluation systems as a means of improving leadership and school performance. With the landscape shifting constantly, GWBI determined that it would be difficult to capture the current state of affairs in principal evaluation.

The data collected are state-reported. The GWBI team did not review state regulatory and administrative code to verify the accuracy of state responses. The data presented in the snapshots were captured through straightforward questioning about state practices. We established clear requirements for principal preparation program components based on recent research and best practices in the field, and asked states to refer to those definitions when defining their state requirements for principal preparation programs.



## STATE DATA KEY FINDINGS

**Our key findings are presented by state role** beginning with *principal effectiveness standards*, which often are used to undergird state policies impacting *principal preparation, licensure, and tenure* decisions and policies. For simplicity, we refer to the District of Columbia as a state, and therefore report data for a total of 51 states.

### PRINCIPAL EFFECTIVENESS STANDARDS

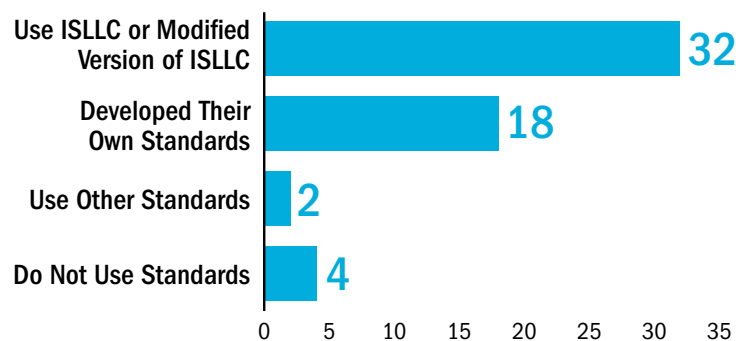
**STATE ROLE:** Set leadership standards that define what successful principals do to improve student achievement

**KEY FINDING:** 47 states report using principal effectiveness standards.

#### Why This Matters

States play an important role in determining the way principals are selected, prepared, licensed, hired, evaluated, supported and developed, promoted, and compensated. Principal effectiveness standards describe the skills, knowledge, dispositions, and behaviors of successful school leaders. States can use these standards to undergird their efforts and policies to ensure an aligned and comprehensive approach to building an effective corps of school leaders. The standards provide a framework to inform such policies as principal preparation program approval, licensure, professional development, and evaluation requirements, ensuring a coherent set of state policies and practices aimed at increasing the number of effective principals in a state. Many states have adopted the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) standards or used a modified version of them. Other states have chosen to develop their own principal effectiveness standards.

#### 47 States Report Using Some Kind of Standards\*

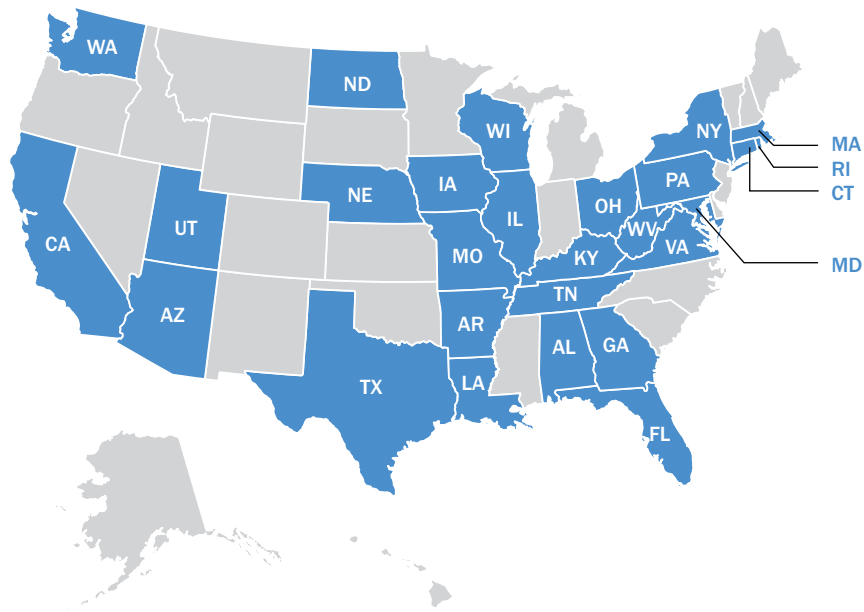


\*Five states provided multiple answers

**STATE ROLE:** Set standards that encompass what current research shows an effective principal needs to know and be able to do to lead schools and improve student achievement

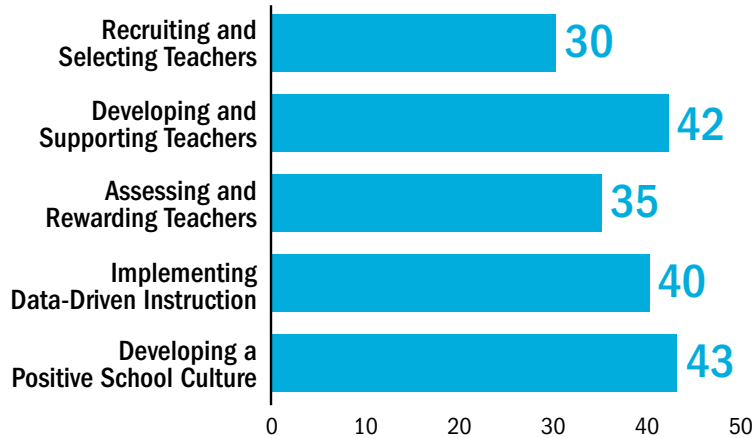
**KEY FINDING:** Only 27 states report including in their standards five key elements that current research<sup>8</sup> shows are important to principal effectiveness today: recruiting and selecting teachers, developing and supporting teachers, assessing and rewarding teachers, implementing data-driven instruction, and developing a positive school culture.

**Only 27 States Report Including All 5 Key Elements that Research Shows Are Critical to Effectiveness in Their Standards**





### Number of States Requiring Each of the 5 Key Elements



#### Why This Matters

Although almost every state reports defining and setting standards for what a principal should know and be able to do, almost half (24 states) are relying on an antiquated understanding of the principal's job as simply an administrative building manager and not what research shows are key aspects of instructional leadership. Effective principals today need strong instructional and leadership skills to promote growth in student learning, manage their human capital, develop and support teachers, use data to drive student learning improvements, and build a culture of high expectations for the adults and students in the building.

Each of these key elements examined in the survey is supported by research. For example, a 30-year meta-analysis by McREL identified 21 specific leadership responsibilities significantly correlated with student achievement. These focus heavily on supporting teachers and taking an active role in improving instruction, with a willingness to actively challenge the status quo. They also note that a principal's focus is important and that only those leaders who consciously attend to school and classroom practices will positively impact student achievement.<sup>9</sup> The Wallace Foundation has issued dozens of research reports on school leadership since 2000, concluding that principals have five key responsibilities: 1) shaping a vision of academic success; 2) creating a school climate hospitable to learning; 3) cultivating leadership in others; 4) improving instruction; and 5) managing people, data, and processes to foster school improvement.<sup>10</sup>

Yet our survey found that 21 states omit from their standards any focus on principals being effective at recruiting and selecting strong teachers for their school. Nine states do not emphasize principals' ability to develop and support teachers. Given that research shows that principals play a critical role in establishing effective teams of teachers,<sup>11</sup> it is surprising that many states still do not include these elements in their standards. Eleven states do not include a focus on data-driven instruction in their standards, another critical skill research shows principals need to have.<sup>12</sup>

Only 17 states report considering even one type of program graduate outcome data when re-approving principal preparation programs. Outcome data includes evidence of graduates securing a job, retaining a job, being effective in raising student achievement, or earning an effective rating on their evaluation.

## PRINCIPAL PREPARATION

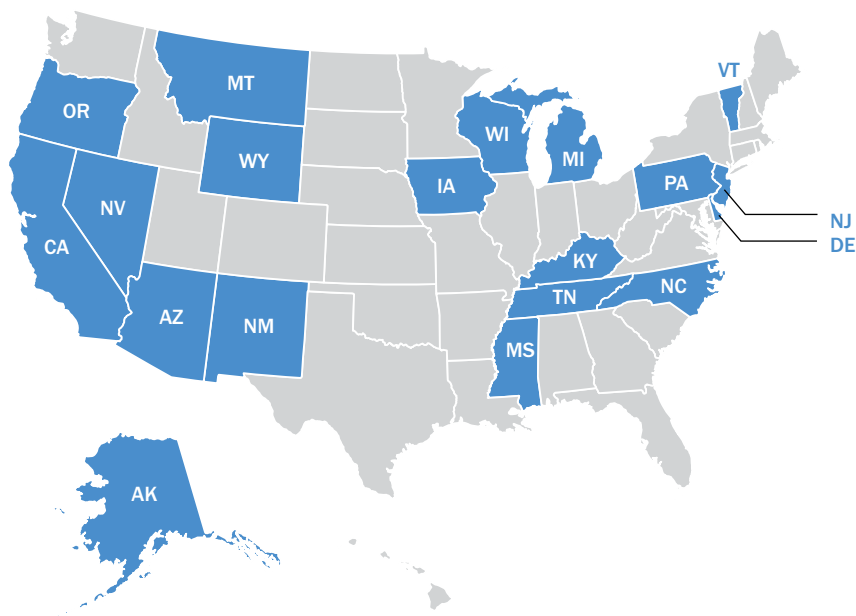
States have tremendous authority when it comes to principal preparation. They are responsible for overseeing and authorizing preparation programs that prospective school leaders must complete to become principals. States define the approval process and specify the elements and programmatic components that need to be included for principal preparation programs to earn state approval. They are also responsible for collecting and monitoring programs to determine program renewal on a periodic basis. Each of these roles is addressed below.

**STATE ROLE:** Oversee and authorize preparation programs that prospective school leaders must complete to become principals

**KEY FINDING:** States reported a total of 978 principal preparation programs in operation across the country.

**KEY FINDING:** 19 states were unable to report how many people graduate from state-approved principal preparation programs in their states on an annual basis.

### 19 States Unable to Report Number of Principal Preparation Program Graduates



### **Why This Matters**

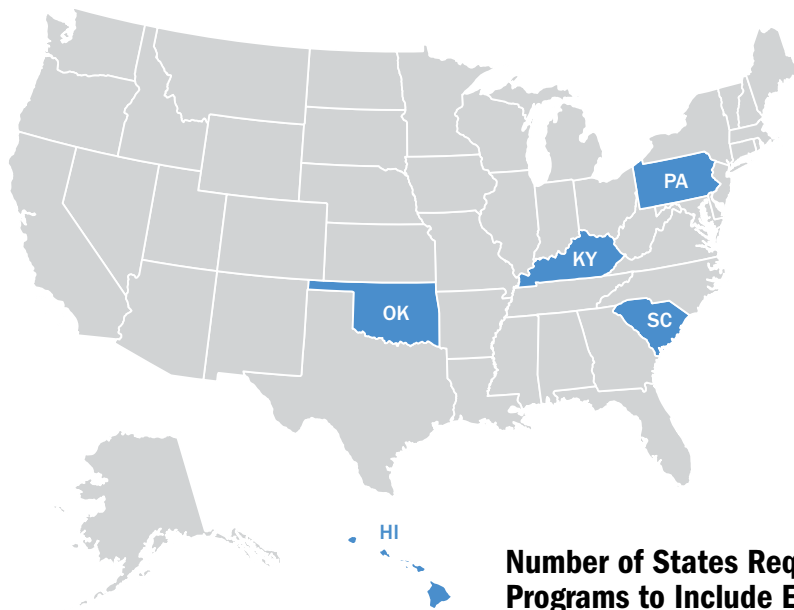
States set the criteria for principal preparation program elements and manage the program approval process, determining the number and type of programs that are approved to operate with state recognition. Surprisingly, 19 states could not report the annual number of graduates from their approved principal preparation programs, making it difficult to know whether a state needs fewer or more programs currently in operation to create a quality supply. Of the 32 states that did have data, they reported graduating a total of 17,188 aspiring principals in 2010-11, but this is an incomplete picture.

This means that many states do not know whether their programs are producing enough new principals to meet the anticipated number of school leader vacancies each year. Thus, they are not in a position to help create and influence the supply of principals needed by their state to improve their schools. As mentioned earlier, the challenge of finding high-quality leaders is not likely to ease up given retirement projections and workforce turnover rates. Both urban and rural districts report difficulty hiring and retaining strong principal candidates. States need to pay particular attention to improving the principal supply for those districts that need strong leaders who can step into leadership roles and have an impact for students.

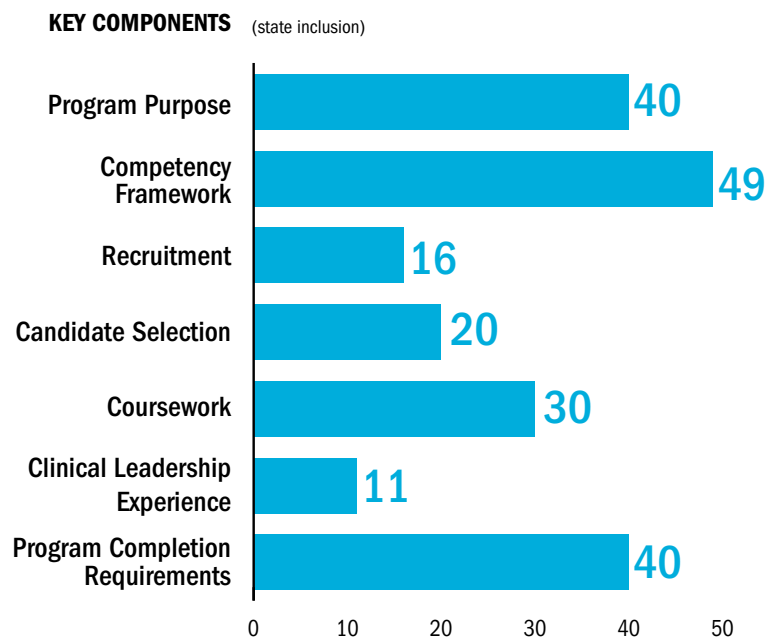
**STATE ROLE:** For approval, require preparation programs to include research-based design elements and programmatic components to ensure that principals are graduating ready for the job

**KEY FINDING:** Only 5 states report requiring principal preparation programs to include all key programmatic components that research<sup>13</sup> shows are critical for effective programs, program purpose, competency framework, recruitment, candidate selection, coursework, clinical leadership experience, and program completion requirements.

### Only 5 States Report Requiring Principal Preparation Programs to Include Key Components Research Shows Are Critical for Effectiveness



**Number of States Requiring Principal Preparation Programs to Include Each of the Key Components**



## Why This Matters

Principal preparation programs are, in theory, designed to ensure that aspiring principals develop the knowledge, skills, and dispositions required for job success. There is a growing body of research highlighting the wide range of skills and behaviors that principals need to succeed in the highly complex and demanding job of school leader.<sup>14</sup> Unfortunately many of our nation's principal preparation programs reflect out-of-date notions of the principal role and do not take into account the latest research findings in their design.

Arthur Levine, a former president of Teachers College, in a well-cited 2005 study of school leadership training at the nation's 1,200 colleges and departments of education, noted that "as a field...educational administration is weak in its standards, curriculum, staffing, the caliber of its student body, and scholarship. Its degrees are low in quality and inappropriate to the needs of school leaders."<sup>15</sup> He concluded in his study that the "majority of programs range from inadequate to appalling, even at some of the country's leading universities."<sup>16</sup> Even more concerning, in a 2003 survey by Public Agenda, two-thirds of principals polled reported that "leadership programs in graduate education are out of touch" with what they needed to know to perform the job effectively.<sup>17</sup> Despite these negative appraisals, the majority of states have not required principal preparation programs to improve.

A variety of experts have highlighted problems with the traditional approach to principal preparation, including low admission standards; faculty who are researchers and often have little or no practitioner experience themselves; limited school-based learning opportunities; and a reliance on theoretical and abstract coursework without the opportunity to practice and apply leadership skills in real-life situations.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, the coursework is frequently outdated and presented as disjointed courses rather than a comprehensive program to ensure that aspiring leaders master the full set of competencies needed to be effective on the job. American Enterprise Institute researchers reviewed the course content of 31 principal preparation programs and determined that programs spent a minimal amount of time covering critical topics that research shows are important to a principal's success such as managing for results, personnel management, and overseeing classroom instruction.<sup>19</sup>

Recently the field has made strides in identifying core programmatic elements that the most effective principal preparation programs have in common and how those programs are designed to prepare principals who can improve student achievement.<sup>20</sup> The following table, *Approaches to Principal Preparation Program Design*, compares the traditional approach to the latest in research and best practice from the field.

### PROMISING EFFORTS:

Illinois is an example of a state that passed legislation requiring all institutions of higher education and other providers of principal preparation to sunset their programs and re-apply based on new standards and requirements. The new standards require an in-person interview process with candidates submitting a portfolio, a school-based clinical experience, and the assessment of candidates on a wide range of key competencies upon program completion. All principal preparation programs are required to meet these new standards by July 2014.

## Approaches to Principal Preparation Program Design

	Traditional Approach	Best Practice
<b>Program Purpose</b>	Programs are open admission and are focused on conferring degrees rather than producing high-quality candidates who intend to pursue school leadership positions	Programs are designed for the express purpose of producing and placing school principals who improve student learning
<b>Competency Framework</b>	Programs have a disparate array of individual courses and program elements with little to no integration to enable candidates to master the set of competency standards	Competencies are clearly defined and all elements of the program are aligned to and designed to ensure that graduates leave with the requisite competencies
<b>Recruitment</b>	Passive recruitment, accepting those candidates who apply to the program and meet a minimum bar	Strategic and proactive recruitment of high-potential candidates who demonstrate the leadership skills, beliefs, and dispositions needed to be prepared to be an effective principal
<b>Candidate Selection</b>	Weak selection policies that rely on paper-based accounts of past experiences and skills, GPAs, and test scores	Rigorous selection process that requires candidates to participate in performance-based assessments and activities (including case studies, simulations, and role plays) to demonstrate the skills, knowledge, and dispositions needed to be prepared to be an effective principal
<b>Coursework</b>	Incoherent, theoretical, and outdated coursework that lacks focus on the skills and actions needed to manage complex schools as instructional leaders	Relevant coursework that includes instructional leadership and human capital performance management as well as the opportunity to practice and apply the learning through simulations, case studies, role plays, and other applications of learning
<b>Clinical Leadership Experience</b>	Limited clinical, school-based experiences that rely mostly on shadowing a school leader rather than doing the work	Authentic learning experiences in real school settings over a significant period of time (at least six months) with candidates assuming real school leadership responsibilities
<b>Program Completion Requirements</b>	Program completion is based on seat time alone without requiring demonstration of mastery of competencies	Clear standards for completion of the program aligned to the competency framework, including a positive rating from the clinical leadership experience and some kind of overall assessment of competency mastery

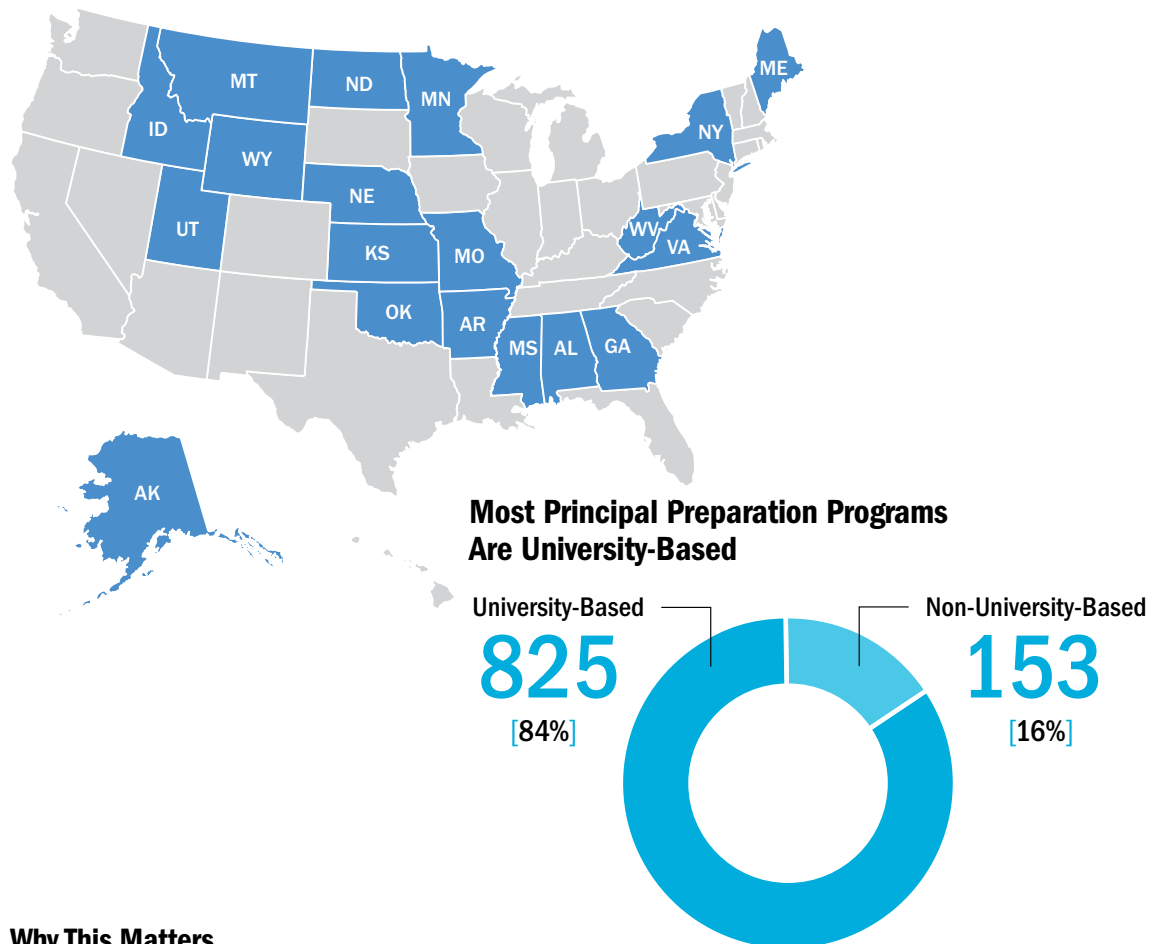
**STATE ROLE:** Equalize the playing field by approving all types of principal preparation programs that meet high-quality standards to produce effective school leaders for the state

**KEY FINDING:** 19 states report that they only allow institutions of higher education to gain approval to operate as a principal preparation program.

**KEY FINDING:** 84 percent of all principal preparation programs in the country are university-based.

**KEY FINDING:** 29 states report having no non-university-based approved programs operating in their state.

### 19 States Limit Principal Preparation to Institutions of Higher Education



#### Why This Matters

As discussed earlier, studies have consistently shown that many university-based preparation programs typically do not include the key design and programmatic elements shown to produce effective principals based on research and best practices in the field. By states only allowing university-based programs to gain approval, they are restricting innovation and the proliferation of other types of programs that have demonstrated effectiveness.

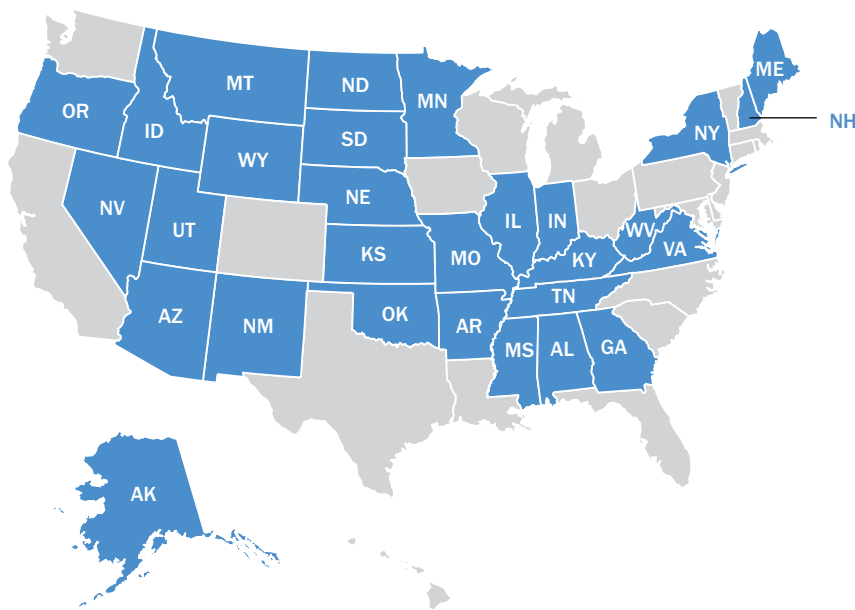
There are a growing number of alternative, non-university-based programs across the country, and many of them are graduating principals who are making a positive difference in their



schools. For example, KIPP (Knowledge Is Power Program) has had much success in training and developing its own school leaders and in 2010 the federal government awarded KIPP with one of only four “Scale-Up” Investing in Innovation grants for \$50 million, based on strong evidence of program effectiveness. Principals trained by New Leaders have academically outpaced their peers by statistically significant margins.<sup>21</sup> The New York City Leadership Academy’s principal preparation program graduates made greater gains in English Language Arts than comparison schools.<sup>22</sup> Each of these programs continues to refine their models for continuous improvement efforts, however results to date demonstrate their models to be promising and often surpassing the results of the traditional higher education institutions. Despite these strong results, a significant number of states have policy statutes that do not allow these and other non-university programs to operate, and/or limit through the approval process principal preparation to higher education institutions only. If states would move from making program approval decisions based on the *type* of the program, to decisions based on the *characteristics* of the program, they could open the playing field to a more diverse set of operators, including districts, non-profits, and charter management organizations that could produce effective school leaders for the state.

States have been willing to allow innovations in other areas of education. For example, charter schools are allowed in 42 states and the District of Columbia.<sup>23</sup> And as of 2010, 48 states and the District of Columbia reported that they have at least some type of alternate route to teacher certification for non-university-based programs.<sup>24</sup>

## 29 States Do Not Have Non-University Principal Preparation Programs in Operation



**FACT:** Ten states (Colorado, Delaware, the District of Columbia, Florida, Hawaii, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Texas, and Vermont) reported that non-university-based programs make up more than 20 percent of their approved principal preparation providers.

Twenty-nine states report having no non-university principal preparation programs in operation. So even when states allow non-university programs to apply for state approval, it is clear that not all states have actively worked to attract, develop, or approve a more varied set of programs that might help them to create a more highly qualified cohort of new principals. The result is that the monopoly of higher education continues; 84 percent of all preparation programs in operation today are housed within institutions of higher education.

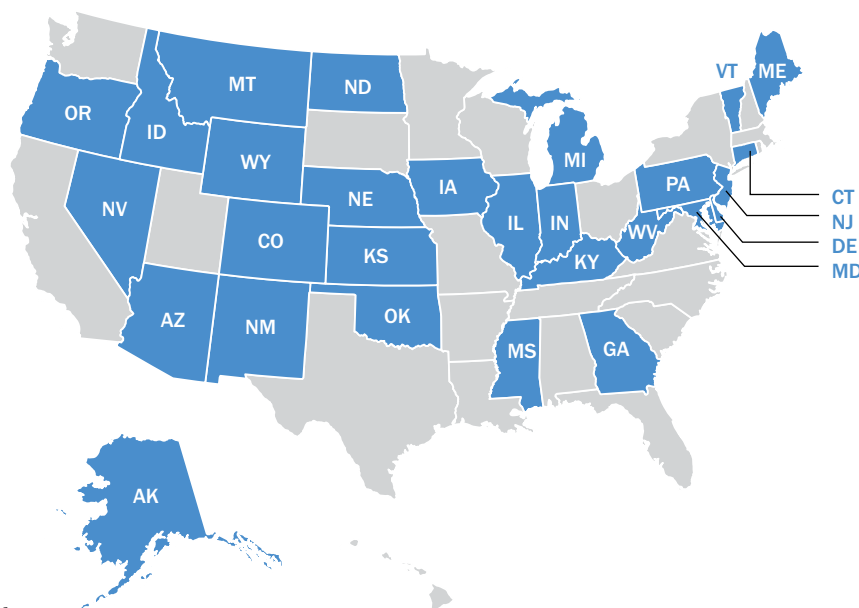
**PROMISING EFFORT:**  
 New York is developing educator preparation program data profile reports that will include program enrollment rates, completion rates, results on licensure exams, employment and retention rates, educator effectiveness, and impact on student learning. The reports are expected to be published starting in fall of 2013.

**STATE ROLE:** Collect and monitor data to know which principal preparation programs are the most successful at producing graduates who become principals and are effective in improving student achievement once on the job

**KEY FINDING:** More than half (28) of the states report that neither the state nor principal preparation programs are required to collect *any* outcome data on principal preparation program graduates to know if they secure jobs, retain them, show impact on student achievement, or earn effective ratings on principal evaluations.

Only 6 states report collecting or requiring principal preparation programs to collect outcome data in all four areas: job placement, retention, performance on the job via student achievement impact, and performance on the job via evaluation.

## 28 States Do Not Collect or Require Programs to Collect Any Principal Preparation Program Outcome Data



**PROMISING EFFORT:**  
 Florida is implementing an electronic data collection, analysis, and reporting tool to enable preparation programs to track and monitor candidate and completion data.

### Why This Matters

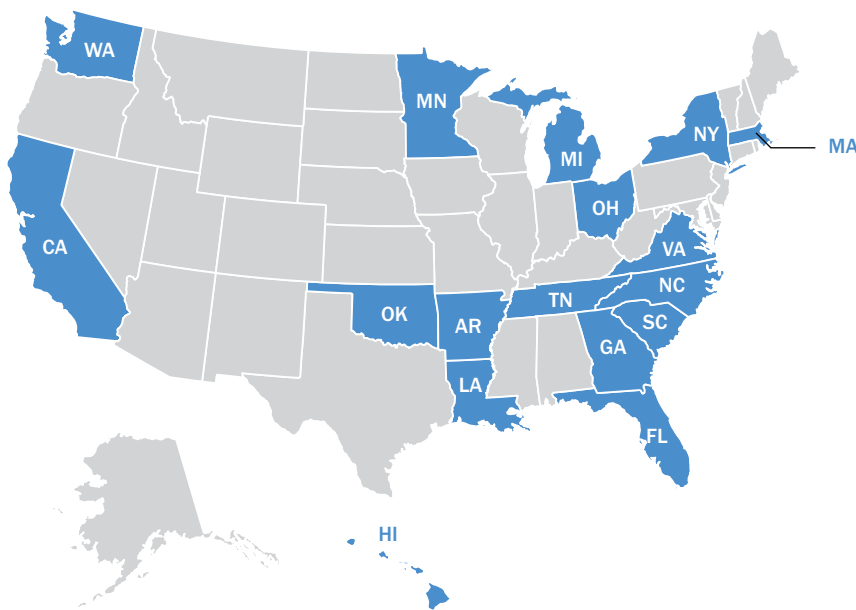
To know if their principal preparation programs are producing enough quality graduates to serve their state's schools, states need to know about the output and outcomes of operating preparation programs. States need to know whether program graduates are obtaining jobs and if so, how successful are they in those jobs. This information can be used for a variety of important purposes. First, the state can hold programs accountable and distinguish high-quality programs from those that are less successful. This would allow states the opportunity to incentivize and expand the capacity of the highest-performing programs to produce more school leaders for the state and intervene with underperforming programs or stop renewing them in the future. These strategic decisions and investments will boost the supply of effective principals.

Second, if publicly reported, this information can inform aspiring principals on the best preparation program options and assist school districts and charters that are hiring to find the strongest principal candidates. Third, the individual preparation programs can use outcome data to inform program design and continue to improve their preparation models.

**STATE ROLE:** Re-approval of principal preparation programs

**KEY FINDING:** Only 17 states report considering even one type of program graduate outcome data when re-approving principal preparation programs. Outcome data includes evidence of graduates securing a job, retaining a job, being effective in raising student achievement, or earning an effective rating on their evaluation.

### 17 States Use Some Outcome Data When Re-Approving Programs



**PROMISING EFFORTS:**  
Delaware introduced new regulations allowing the state to hold preparation programs accountable for the quality of their principal graduates.

### Why This Matters

Every state requires its principal preparation programs to re-apply for approval after a determined period of time. This is an opportunity for states to probe for evidence of quality implementation and effectiveness of principal preparation programs over time. Yet, most states rely on process measurements and fail to use any outcome data. The result is many states are not spending their resources effectively to increase the supply of high-quality principals. Instead of only renewing those programs that are graduating strong leaders, states end up renewing ineffective programs that fail to prepare leaders who can improve our schools. This is an unproductive and inefficient use of resources.

In particular, states could be tracking program outcomes to understand whether graduates are successful in earning licensure, securing a job, retaining that job, and being effective in raising student achievement. This would enable states to better understand which preparation programs are producing the most effective principals and which the weakest. Using that data, states could hold existing programs accountable for making improvements or deny renewal for poor performers and work to expand high-quality options.

Only 6 states report requiring principals to prove that they are effective school leaders to renew their licenses.

## PRINCIPAL LICENSURE

**STATE ROLE:** Grant licenses to aspiring principals to enable them to be hired for a school leadership position

**KEY FINDING:** 7 states could not report how many principal licenses are granted on an annual basis. Of the 44 states that did have data, they reported granting licenses to a total of 29,868 principals in 2010-11 but this is obviously an incomplete picture.

### Why This Matters

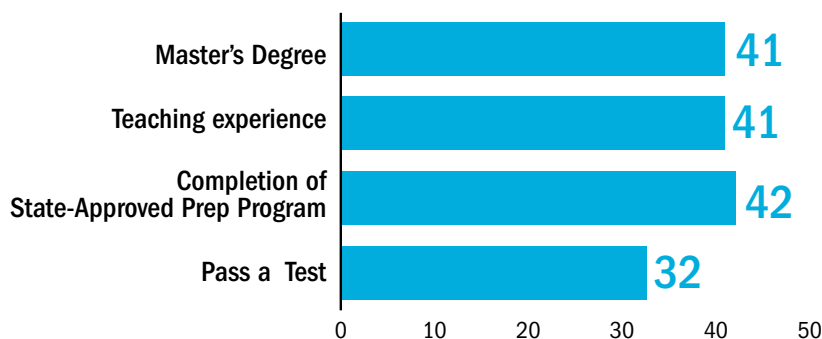
States need to know whether their supply of newly licensed principals will meet their projected school leadership vacancy rates. Yet, some states do not routinely collect and monitor how many candidates are securing new licenses each year, much less track their effectiveness on the job once licensed. Even in states that do collect data, some states do not disaggregate the data, conflating the number of new licenses and license renewals.

**FACT:** 30 states reported having a provisional license phase that enables aspiring principals to obtain a job before securing a more permanent license.

**STATE ROLE:** Grant licenses to those aspiring principals who demonstrate the required competencies to be effective on the job

**KEY FINDING:** Most states are relying on input measures only—such as master’s degrees, teaching experience, completing an approved principal preparation program, and passing a test—when granting initial licensure.

**Number of States Requiring Various Principal Licensure Prerequisites**



### Why This Matters

In most other professional fields, licensing systems are designed to require some kind of proof of competence. While every state requires that K–12 public school leaders be licensed (signaling readiness to be hired), the licensure requirements set by state education boards or credentialing bodies do not align with a known ability of the leader to perform the job. Instead, states by and large measure process inputs such as previous experience in teaching

or obtained level of education. There is little to no research supporting these criteria as accurate proxies or predictors of principal effectiveness.<sup>25</sup> Beyond this, input-based measures such as years of teaching do not require aspiring leaders to demonstrate the competencies that research has shown are necessary for effectiveness before gaining their licenses.

Take the master's degree, for example. There is little to no evidence of any relationship between school performance and principal education level.<sup>26</sup> The requirement that principals have a master's degree has mostly served as a way of ensuring the monopoly of institutions of higher education in principal preparation and the exclusion of the other types of programs. It also likely contributes to the slow expansion of a more diverse set of providers for principal preparation.

As addressed above, completing what is often a poor-quality preparation program is also no assurance of readiness for the job, especially when state programmatic and design requirements are outdated and states do not take into account program effectiveness when making re-approval decisions. In most states, principal preparation programs are not required to attest to their participants' competency level before graduating them. Programs simply confer degrees, rather than certify that aspiring principals have demonstrated mastery of competencies before graduating.

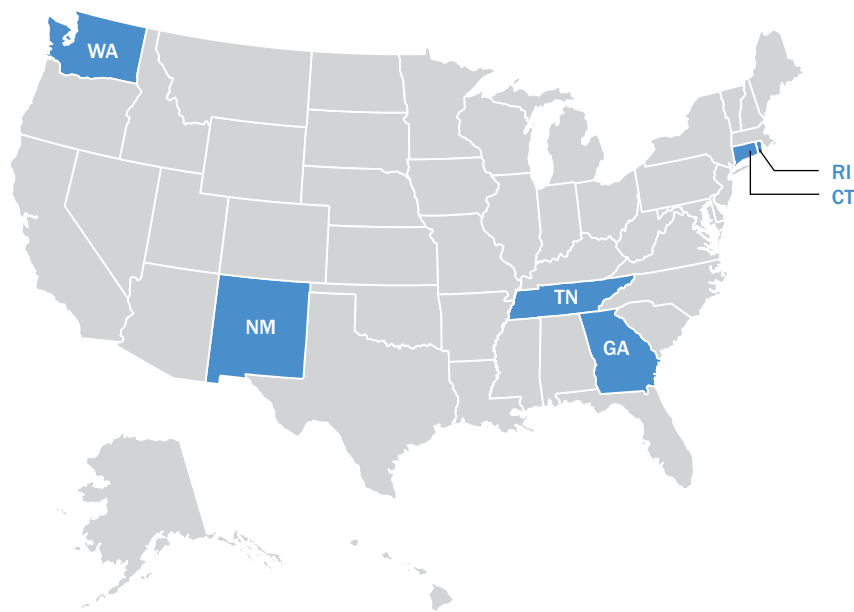
Current principal certification exams are also not structured to test an aspiring principal's ability to respond to a series of simultaneous challenges and competing priorities like those they face when leading real schools. These exams mostly test basic knowledge rather than measuring the more complex skills research shows effective leaders need to have such as problem solving in complex situations and developing a plan of action; observing and coaching teachers; managing change in a school and inspiring adults to have high expectations for themselves and their students; and analyzing data to identify school strengths and weaknesses. Unless exams are rigorous, well-designed performance-based assessments, it is unlikely that passing an exam is a valid predictor of principal performance on the job.

**PROMISING EFFORTS:**  
Indiana, Minnesota,  
and New York indicated  
on the survey that they  
are trying to implement  
new performance-based  
assessments that principals  
will be required to pass  
before earning licensure.

**STATE ROLE:** Determine the criteria for licensure renewal, allowing principals to seek and maintain school leadership positions

**KEY FINDING:** Only 6 states report requiring principals to prove that they are effective school leaders to renew their licenses. Evidence includes demonstrating an impact on student achievement; recruiting, developing, and retaining effective teachers; and/or earning effective evaluation ratings.

### 6 States Require Principals to Demonstrate Effectiveness to Renew their Licenses



#### PROMISING EFFORTS:

Rhode Island outlined a plan in its winning Race to the Top application that calls for a transformation of the state's current educator licensure system into one that awards and renews full licensure based on evidence of effectiveness. The state introduced tiered licensure and beginning in 2015, principal licensure renewal will be based on effectiveness as determined by evaluation ratings. If new principals are found to be ineffective for five consecutive years, the state will rescind their principal and teaching licenses.

#### Why This Matters

In most states, principals are required to renew their licenses after a certain period of time; the average is every 4.8 years. This is an opportunity for states to ensure that they only renew the licensure of principals who demonstrate effectiveness in developing and supporting high-quality teachers and improving student outcomes. The majority of states, however, are not reviewing school or principal evaluation data or requiring principals to somehow demonstrate their impact on teaching and learning in their schools. Nor do they incorporate performance-based elements into their licensure models that would at least verify that principals have certain competencies and skills. Instead, much like the initial licensure process, states typically base renewal decisions on inputs such as requiring principals to attend professional development sessions or log time on the job.

While states would need to consider how much time on the job is reasonable before holding principals accountable for achieving results, they certainly could be doing more to require principals to demonstrate their skills and an ability to improve both student learning and teacher effectiveness when renewing licenses. And at a minimum, states could ensure they are not renewing the license of any leaders who receive repeated unsatisfactory evaluations.

#### PROMISING EFFORTS:

Louisiana has approved changes to its licensure system, requiring that principals demonstrate three years of effective evaluation ratings over a five-year span in order to retain their licenses.

In the 7 states where tenure is granted at the state level, leaders only need to serve for 2.5 years on average before being granted life tenure.

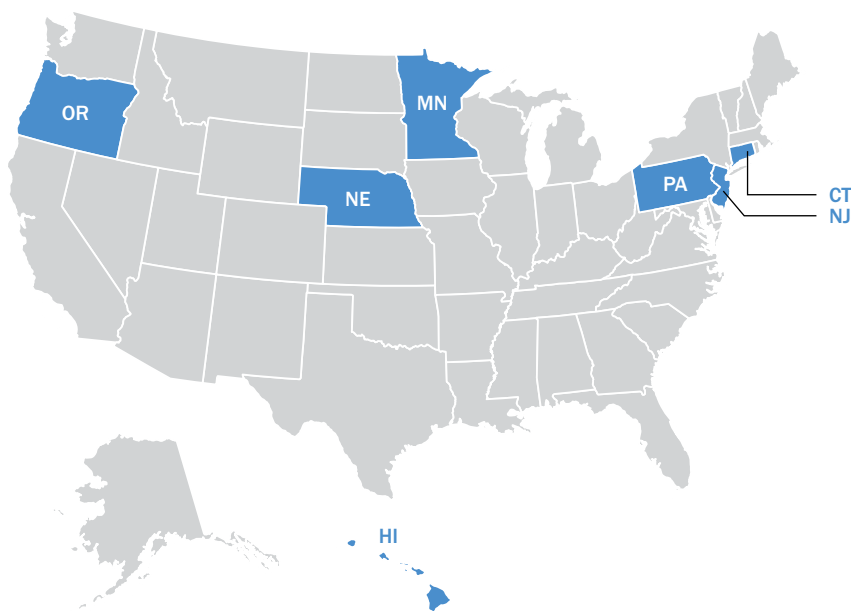


## PRINCIPAL TENURE

**STATE ROLE:** Determine if there will be a state tenure system for leaders

**KEY FINDING:** In the 7 states where tenure is granted at the state level, leaders only need to serve for 2.5 years on average before being granted life tenure.

### 7 States Grant Principal Tenure at the State Level



**FACT:** 33 states report having no principal tenure. In 11 states, principal tenure is determined at the local level.

### Why This Matters

It is rarely the case that principal tenure is granted at the state level, but seven states do give school leaders permanent job security after a designated period of time on the job regardless of their performance. Our survey found that the average amount of employment time was 2.5 years to gain permanent job security. Tenure is a highly charged issue because it appears to emphasize the right to the job without necessarily requiring evidence of effectiveness. There have been calls to repeal principal tenure and many states have done so in recent years. While it is possible to remove tenured principals from the job, critics note that the process for removing ineffective tenured educators is usually costly and time-consuming.<sup>27</sup>



# STATE POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

**Schools need good leaders.** Early in the paper we defined three broad policy levers available to states to improve the school leader supply: approving principal preparation programs, establishing standards for receiving and keeping a license, and monitoring principal quality. At present, our data show that states have an inconsistent and largely uninformed approach to these responsibilities. We posit that states are “operating in the dark” largely because of the lack of data the policymakers collect that would inform these responsibilities. And without data, it is quite difficult to identify the problems and devise appropriate solutions.

States are also operating somewhat blindly by overlooking what research says matters for school leadership. Yet, if schools are to improve and students are to meet high standards, the country needs more effective school leaders. There is a growing interest in seeking and creating new avenues for training leaders (apart from the traditional university programs). Along with our policy work, GWBI is building a network of innovative and high-quality principal preparation programs led by districts, universities, charter schools, and non-profit organizations. Part of our work in supporting these programs is ensuring that they are able to enter the market and that they are held accountable for generating high-quality leaders that our students need and our teachers deserve.

We offer the following recommendations as to how states could use their authority to strengthen principal effectiveness standards, principal preparation program oversight, principal licensure, and principal outcome data.

## PRINCIPAL EFFECTIVENESS STANDARDS

- If states set standards, they should use them to undergird their entire principal system from principal preparation program approval to licensure to evaluation. Any standards set should be rigorous, reflect up-to-date research, and align to college and career readiness standards.

## PRINCIPAL PREPARATION PROGRAM OVERSIGHT

- States should adopt and implement rigorous program approval standards to ensure that principal preparation programs produce high-quality candidates. Specifically, states should hold preparation programs accountable for their graduates’ performance and track outcome data. States should close programs that continually receive low ratings and incentivize programs whose ratings indicate exemplary performance to expand. Before these data are available and states know which programs are most effective, states should require all programs to be based on design and programmatic elements aligned to current research and what has been learned from the most effective programs.
- States should allow institutions other than higher education institutions to be approved to provide principal preparation as long as those programs meet rigorous state-required standards.

## PRINCIPAL LICENSURE

- States should move away from input-based requirements such as years of teaching and degrees when granting initial licenses to principals and use performance-based assessments. While performance-based assessments can be costly and more difficult to develop, states can work together to influence the development of new performance-based assessments. States could also require principal preparation programs to play a more significant role in verifying their graduates' competency levels to complete their programs so that graduation is linked to effectively mastering the standards of the program, which are aligned to rigorous state standards.
- States should base principal license renewal decisions on job performance and demonstration of competencies that correlate with principal effectiveness measures, including impact on student achievement. Leaders repeatedly receiving poor ratings should not have their licenses renewed.

## PRINCIPAL OUTCOME DATA

- States need to either further develop or leverage their existing investment in statewide longitudinal data systems and enable them to track principals as they move from principal preparation to licensure to school leadership positions. States need to be able to measure principals' ability to secure jobs, retain jobs, demonstrate an impact on student achievement, and receive effective evaluation ratings. This information will help states to make strategic decisions and investments that result in a more highly qualified principal pool.

# CONCLUSION

**Principals are a critical force in school improvement** in that they are responsible for attracting and retaining teacher talent and driving the improvement of student learning. Despite the fact that states play a key role in cultivating school leaders, in too many cases they are not effectively using their principal preparation and licensure oversight authority to increase the quality and quantity of school leaders. In general, states are not demanding high-quality and rigorous criteria when approving principal preparation programs or using the licensure process to validate and confirm that principals are indeed ready for the job and effective once employed as campus leaders.

There is also a troubling absence of metrics and data on principal supply overall, whether preparation programs are actually producing principals who have an impact in schools, and whether licensure requirements are meaningful. This lack of information prohibits states from making good decisions regarding the supply and training of school leaders.

Although we were heartened by state interest in bringing additional rigor and oversight to principal preparation and licensure, it is clear that a significant number of states appear to be operating in the dark when it comes to managing their principal supply pipelines.

It is our hope that this set of baseline data will promote further conversations and state-led efforts to ensure that every school in the nation is led by a highly prepared school leader who can produce student gains.

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## About the Authors

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Kerri Briggs has served as the Director for Education Reform for the George W. Bush Institute since 2010. As the Director, Kerri oversees educational initiatives addressing school leadership, middle school reform, global competitiveness, and accountability. Previously, Briggs served as State Superintendent of Education for Washington, D.C. As a member of the team that won a federal Race to the Top grant for the city, she was instrumental in one of the nation's most visible education reform efforts. Previously, Briggs served as Assistant Secretary for Elementary and Secondary Education in the US Department of Education. As Assistant Secretary, she played a pivotal role in policy and management issues affecting elementary and secondary education. Before assuming the Assistant Secretary role, Briggs also served as Acting Assistant Secretary for Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development and as a Senior Policy Advisor in the Office of the Deputy Secretary, where she worked on K-12 policy and regulations pertaining to the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

The author of articles on reading, charter schools and school-based management, Briggs was the co-editor of *Reading in the Classroom: Systems for Observation of Teaching and Learning*, published in 2003. Briggs earned a Bachelor of Arts in political science from Stephen F. Austin State University and a Masters in Public Policy and Ph.D. in Education Policy and Organizational Studies from the University of Southern California.

### GRETCHEN RHINES CHENEY

Gretchen Rhines Cheney founded and leads the PAROS Group, a Washington, DC-based independent education consulting operation. PAROS Group helps national, state and local organizations working along the continuum of K-12, higher education and workforce development to articulate, share, and spread effective practices and policies. Cheney has served as a policy advisor to the Alliance to Reform Education Leadership since 2011. She has particular expertise in the area of school leadership and is a published author with pieces published by the Center for American Progress, the Rainwater Charitable Foundation, and others.

Before starting PAROS Group, she spent nine years with America's Choice, Inc. spearheading school turnaround efforts at the secondary school and district level. She also worked at the National Center on Education and the Economy, the Council on Competitiveness, the National Alliance of Business, and the Progressive Policy Institute. Cheney holds a master's degree in public policy from Georgetown University and a bachelor's degree in political science from the University of California at San Diego.

### JACQUELYN DAVIS, J.D.

As a George W. Bush Institute Fellow, Jacquelyn Davis is a key strategic advisor for the Alliance to Reform Education Leadership. She also leads ED-Volution Education Group, a boutique K-12 education consulting firm. ED-Volution works with leading sector entrepreneurs and philanthropic organizations on strategy, initiative development, growth and management and provides subject matter expertise in turnaround; the charter sector; state, city and district redesign; and human capital with a special focus on school leadership. Davis co-authored *A New Approach to Principal Preparation: Innovative Programs Share Their Practices and Lessons Learned* and The Center for American Progress' *Gateways to the Principalship: State Power to Improve the Quality of School Leaders*. Previously, she launched and led the DC Program of New Leaders. She also co-founded Thurgood Marshall Academy (TMA) Public Charter High School and Hands on DC. Prior to her work in education, Davis served as a Congressional Chief of Staff, Legislative Director, Legislative Assistant and a Congressional political campaign manager.

Davis earned a law degree with honors from Georgetown University and holds a bachelor's degree in public policy from Brown University. She was named a "Washingtonian of the Year" by *Washingtonian Magazine* and was profiled in Education Next magazine for her work to turnaround schools in Washington, DC.

### KERRY ANN MOLL, ED.D.

Kerry Ann Moll joined the George W. Bush Institute as the Program Director of the Alliance to Reform Education Leadership (AREL) in July of 2012. Prior to becoming Program Director for AREL, Moll served as a Partner for The New Teacher Project (TNTP) where she oversaw their Texas initiative. As Partner, she was responsible for strategy and programming in Austin, Dallas, El Paso, Fort Worth, and San Antonio. During her time with TNTP, Moll worked on the team that secured a 2010 federal Investing in Innovation (i3) grant that allowed for the expansion of TNTP's Texas work and collaborated with charter Teach For America programs in San Antonio and Dallas. Beyond this, she served on the Texas Education Agency's Educator Standards Advisory Board, and was an active member of the State Board for Educator Certification Advisory Committee.

Before joining TNTP, Moll spent ten years working as a teacher, coach and administrator in public schools across Texas. She holds a BS in English Education from Indiana University at Bloomington, and a M.Ed. from Texas State University. A graduate of The University of Texas at Austin's Cooperative Superintendency Program, Moll received her doctorate in 2009. Her research focused on central office data use and effective uses of data to support teaching and learning.



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